Remarks as delivered by
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Director of National Intelligence

IATA – AVSEC World

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Thank you, Tony [Tyler, IATA Director General and CEO] for that kind introduction. I've been told I'm the first person to represent the Intelligence Community speaking at AVSEC World, and that's probably a precedent we should have set a long time ago. Since this is my first time speaking publicly with IATA at all, I really appreciate you extending this invitation.

This is a propitious time to be talking about the intersection of intelligence and aviation, in light of current world events and in light of historical perspectives. I can't find a citation for the precise day of the very first use of an airplane for intelligence purposes, but it's almost certainly 100 years ago, near the start of World War I, probably within a month or two of today.

For decades before that first reconnaissance flight, field commanders had employed tethered balloons to get a bird's eye view and to scout out enemy positions. It's the historical version of UAVs. But it was 1914 when planes were first used on the battlefield.

That was just 11 years after the Wright brothers first demonstrated that 3-axis controls could make controlled flight possible, and so aviation was a dangerous business, but that first recon flight in 1914 gave a glorious freedom to see the full scope of the battlefield and to move freely across battle lines.

I remember it fondly. [laughter]

Of course, the connections between the worlds of intelligence and aviation have changed a lot in 100 years. We in the U.S. Intelligence Community still use aviation for surveillance and reconnaissance of course, but aviation has grown into a huge, and hugely important, industry.

We pulled the numbers as of a few months ago. Globally, there are 47 million flights each year with 3.3 billion passengers, about the population of China and India combined; and 48 million tons of cargo, valued at 5.3 trillion (with a "T") dollars. That's a few hundred million larger than the GDP of Japan, which is behind only the U.S. and

China. And civil aviation is critical for global supply chain networks commerce and tourism. So it's critical to everyone's economy.

So, over the past few decades, because of its massive scale and importance, the civil aviation world has increasingly crossed paths with my world of intelligence, as we try to see, hear, or sniff out threats to the safe and legal use of air travel, which is so critical to the world. And, of course, both of our worlds changed forever 13 years ago with the terrorist attacks here in the United States.

I don't know how many people here have read the 9/11 Commission Report, but it's worth reading, or reading again, when you get a chance. It opens with the story of people going to work in New York and Arlington, Virginia, and with Mohamed Atta and his terror cell getting on a plane in Portland, Maine.

It tells what happened that day and how we responded, and it analyzes the missed opportunities the Intelligence Community had to perhaps keep the terrorist attacks from happening. The 9/11 commissioners graphically describe the intelligence picture for the summer before the attacks with the phrase, "the system was blinking red."

I want to read a passage that I think nails the problems we had as a community. The commissioners wrote, "The agencies cooperated, some of the time. But even such cooperation as there was is not the same as joint action. When agencies cooperate, one defines the problem and seeks help with it. When they act jointly, the problem and options for action are defined differently from the start. Individuals from different backgrounds come together in analyzing a case and planning how to manage it."

Ten years ago, to correct that fault in the Intelligence Community, Congress and the President created the position of the Director of National Intelligence, which I now occupy and have for the past four years. And it feels like it.

Part of my statutory job description designates me as the President's senior intelligence advisor, and another part says I control the national intelligence budget, which by the way has not gotten a pass from sequestration either. But I believe the third duty of the DNI is the most critical, bridging that "joint action" gap that the 9/11 Commission identified.

And that responsibility goes way beyond just getting the intelligence agencies to talk to one another. It's about helping them to recognize the cultural strengths and capabilities that each of the 17 Intelligence Community elements brings to the table and then getting them to think as a community, bringing our best and most appropriate community resources to bear against our toughest community problems.

That's what I've referred to as "intelligence integration," and it's been my theme for the past four years, because I believe that's what the 9/11 Commission had in mind and what was instantiated in law by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of

2004. I believe it's the prerequisite to reaching the 9/11 Commission's goal that we act jointly as an integrated Intelligence Community.

That's integration "horizontally," across agency lines, with each agency on equal footing and stature. But I also believe we have to work toward "vertical" integration from federal to state, and to local, tribal, and territorial governments and their law-enforcement to other government agencies, like the FAA & TSA, and also to industry partners, like many here.

That's why I'm here this morning, and that's why I designated Tina Gabbrielli as my de facto national intelligence manager for aviation, dedicated support staff, reporting directly to me on threats to aviation. She is responsible for planning and integrating intelligence on aviation threats, both horizontally and vertically. She and her staff regularly engage people in this room and others in civil aviation to include equipment manufacturers, airlines, cargo carriers, general aviation, airports, technology firms and elements of leadership, security, and critical infrastructure.

In September, working with the private sector, we stood up an air domain intelligence-integration and analysis fusion cell at TSA, where analysts and security professionals from both the public and private sector, including manufacturers, airlines, and airports, can voluntarily share threat information and intelligence, and we hope to grow this capability.

The cell has been invaluable in helping to sort information on the current Ebola crisis, and we think it will continue to get stronger and better as it integrates with other government and private sector participants. Tina will be speaking later today, and she'll get into more details on our initiatives to partner more closely with you and to address the threats we've identified together.

Tony asked me to talk about those threats today, and that's certainly something that falls into my job jar. Every spring for the past four years, and I'll be doing it again this spring, I've made the rounds on Capitol Hill, testifying in open sessions to our various Congressional oversight committees about our assessments of worldwide threats.

Talking to Congress about classified matters in televised sessions is one of my favorite things to do, [laughter], right up there with a root canal, or folding fitted sheets. [laughter] But it's good to be as transparent with the public as we can. That's been my major takeaway of the past year-and-a-half of the extensive public discussions about the Intelligence Community.

The best way to deal with misconceptions that have resulted from the leaks, I believe, is, to the extent we can, to increase transparency. And I think it surprises some people that we also focus on threats that aren't terrorists, particularly in the aviation sphere. That's why, a year-and-a-half ago, we really made news with the Intelligence Community's threat assessment, when "cyber" bumped "terrorism" off the top of our list of threats.

Every year, I've told Congress that we're facing the most diverse array of threats I've seen in all my years in the intelligence business. That line has morphed from "my almost 50 years in the intelligence business," to "my 50 years," to "my more than 50 years in the intelligence business." [laughter] And I'll keep doing that till I'm done.

That line continues to be true, because the threats have grown substantially more diverse every year, so much so that this year I had to go back to the Hill in the late summer to give a mid-year threat update.

That diversity of threats continues to grow, across the board, for global regions and intelligence functions. And in the civil aviation world, the threats, as all of you know painfully well, are myriad. That includes both "threats to" aviation and threats "enabled by" aviation.

We're spending more and more time with that second category. Everyone here knows illicit logistics networks are a global industry, and that nation-states, corporations, criminal organizations, terrorist networks, and individuals use the global air transport system to move money and goods illegally.

That can be anything from weapons of mass destruction to counterfeit and contraband goods, and even people. Some are looking to evade international sanctions. And some are trafficking in narcotics and human beings. These are all national, and global, security threats.

And very recently, we've had to think about Ebola as a security issue. I've spent more time and energy on Ebola than most people would think a DNI would. It's not the sort of thing we spy on, but nevertheless there are intelligence implications of Ebola as well. It's got our attention. It is indeed, as the President has said, a national security issue. And we're very open to working with you to find solutions to prevent a West African epidemic from turning into a global pandemic.

So the scope of threats "enabled by" air travel has shifted and grown, and so has the scope of "threats to" aviation. That conversation, of course, starts with terrorism.

We all know civil aviation is a reoccurring target for terrorist groups, because of the size and scope of the aviation industry, the dependence of the global economy on aviation, and the significant and dramatic effects a successful attack on civil aviation can have on world psyche.

While there had been terrorist attacks of aviation for many years, most notably the Libyan bombing of Pan Am Fight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, they were at their most coordinated and destructive, of course, on September 11, 2001. And the threat really isn't diminishing. It's spreading globally and it is morphing into more and more so-called "franchises" several of which have great aspirations for attacking civil aviation.

In the past 13 years as we have significantly degraded al Qaida's ability to coordinate attacks, we've seen potential terrorists try a variety of tactics, including hiding explosives in their shoes, underwear, and air cargo and also attempting to explode car bombs outside airports.

Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, AQAP, has tried to attack airliners and air cargo flights three times, in 2009, 2010, and 2012. And as has been recently reported, the Khorasan Group in Syria would like to strike at civil air targets.

Those threats are frightening enough, but we've seen a number of trends that make the terrorist threat more dangerous and harder to defend against. First and foremost, the more than 16,000 foreign fighters who gravitated to Syria are now returning to their countries of origin, including in the West. They've picked up dangerous skills and radicalization, both at the same time.

Recently, a man named Abdifatah Ahmed traveled to Syria to join ISIL. He is a former Minneapolis aircraft cleaner and refueler – with about 10 years working behind the scenes in airport operations. So we find it frightening to imagine how terrorist groups could take advantage of expertise people like him could bring to the group.

And the thought of malicious insiders now working in the industry is even scarier. These are potential lone-wolf terrorists who have, not only knowledge about how to conduct an attack, but also access to planes, aviation systems, and airport secured areas.

We're also concerned with advances with, and globalization of, technology. Aviation IT systems are as vulnerable to cyber theft and attack as any others.

We're also concerned with advances in UAVs and their proliferation in the hands of bad guys.

Developments in the fields of plastics and non-metallic explosives will challenge existing security screening capabilities.

And it's less exotic, but shoulder-launched surface to air missiles have proven deadly. We've seen more than 50 deliberate attacks on civilian planes with those missiles, mostly in Africa and Asia, and mostly just after takeoff. Thirty of those have resulted in 1,000 civilian deaths.

So the terrorist threat has not diminished and is not diminishing, and the intelligence and aviation communities have other threats to contend with besides terrorism.

The recent shoot down of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine showed that threats to civilian aviation are not limited to terrorists bringing down aircraft on takeoff, when planes are most vulnerable, with whatever technology they can scrape together. We have to be concerned that nation states with sophisticated surface to air weapon systems can threaten aircraft at cruising altitude.

The downing of MH-17 felt very personal for me. It stirred up some emotions from three decades ago when I was one of two Air Force Colonels who led the investigation into the Soviet Union intercepting and shooting down Korean Airlines Flight 007 over the Sea of Japan.

It's a curious and interesting aspect of reaching geezerdom, and I've got one foot in assisted living at this point [laughter], but I tend to dwell on history. And I see a lot of similarities between the two incidents. I've seen similar global outrage, and I've seen efforts by the Russians to spin and obfuscate what happened, just as the Soviets did 31 years ago. That includes fabricating imagery to convey another story.

And so this has also conjured up memories of how hard it was to reconstruct what happened to KAL-007. It took us months to piece things together well enough to draw preliminary conclusions.

That's the one huge difference between what happened in 1983 and what happened this year. The U.S. Intelligence Community is much more capable now. We have National Technical Means sources that we didn't have then. We have social media, which is huge for intelligence purposes, and open source intelligence that didn't exist then.

There are new and powerful capabilities in all of the Intelligence Community agencies and components. And we've integrated in ways we simply weren't, even a few years ago. We learned tough lessons about integration from 9/11.

So as a result of the Intelligence Community's transformation of the past decade we had a very good idea of what happened to Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 within hours.

Of course, some people want us to be more transparent, to lay out everything we know. And while we're definitely headed in the direction of more transparency, we also have to protect our intelligence sources and methods, our sensitive tradecraft, so we can keep using them. In other words, transparency is great, but a double-edged sword. Our adversaries go to school on us.

I also have to note that the Intelligence Community has neither the eyes nor ears of God, as some people ascribe to us. And I think people really saw that with respect to the unfortunate loss of Malaysian Airlines Flight 370.

And many people want us to be faster – instantaneous – and we're working toward that too. But I remember my days in Vietnam, when automation was acetate, grease pencil, and two corporals. [laughter]

We've come a long way as a Community since then, and since 2001. And the work of intelligence integration is still going on. I think of it as a perpetual journey, not a

destination. That's something the civil aviation community knows a lot about. And our journey going forward is going to include working more closely with you.

This industry is critical to the global economy. It promotes commerce, travel, and freedom of movement around the world. So you aren't going to shut down to avoid threats.

Charles Lindbergh once said, "If one took no chances, one would not fly at all. Safety lies in the judgment of the chances one takes."

I believe that's the flight path our perpetual journey follows, helping each other assess and understand the world of aviation, its threats and its opportunities, and in working toward making good judgments in the choices we make and chances we take.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak this morning. I hope the rest of this conference is productive. And I hope the partnership of the U.S. Intelligence Community with the international civil aviation community continues to grow in depth and strength going forward.

Thanks for having me here and for listening.

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